

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SEOUL 8223

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, PINT, KS
SUBJECT: PROGRESS TOWARD RELAXATION OF PRESSURE ON DISSIDENTS
SLOWS

REF: SEOUL 7876

SUMMARY: CHUSOK (KOREAN THANKSGIVING DAY SEPTEMBER 27)
PASSED AND ROKG FAILED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OCCASION TO
RELEASE MORE POLITICAL PRISONERS. ROKG INTEREST IN GETTING
PRISONERS TO SIGN STATEMENTS OF REPENTANCE HAS
FLAGGED NOTICEABLY SINCE SUMMER, BUT, ON THE OTHER HAND,
ROKG HAS NOT RESUMED STRICT CONTROLS IT ALLOWED TO LAPSE
IN EARLIER PART OF THE YEAR. PAK TONG-SUN CASE MAY BE
PLAYING A ROLE IN LULL IN MOVEMENT TOWARD RELAXATION,
BUT POSSIBILITY OF FURTHER RELEASES OR PRISONERS IN
FUTURE AND OF SOME PROGRESS TOWARD "POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT"
CANNOT BE RULED OUT. END SUMMARY

1. NO PRISONERS WERE RELEASED FOR CHUSOK, AND KOREANS
LOOKING FOR SIGNS OF A THAW IN THE ROKG'S ATTITUDES
TOWARD POLITICAL DISSENT WERE DISAPPOINTED. CLEARLY,
INTENSE PROSELYTIZING BY ROKG OFFICIALS AMONG POLITICAL
PRISONERS FOR SIGNED STATEMENTS WHICH WOULD PERMIT THEIR
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RELEASE HAD FALLED OFF IN RECENT WEEKS. YET, THE ROKG
HAS NOT WITHDRAWN ITS OFFER TO RELEASE POLITICAL PRISONERS
WHO SIGN SUCH STATEMENTS.

2. IN ADDITION, THE ROKG HAS NOT REIMPOSED THE FAR
STRICTER CONTROLS OVER DISSENT AND IDSSIDENTS IT EXERCISED
SIX MONTHS AGO. THE PRESS CONTINUES TO CARRY MUCH MORE

NEWS THAN IT DID BEFORE, AND THE ROKG HAS RETAINED A MUCH HIGHER THRESHOLD OF TOLERANCE FOR THE ACTIVITIES AND STATEMENTS OF INDIVIDUAL DISSIDENTS. AUTHORITIES STILL SEEM TO PREFER TO HEAD OFF INCIDENTS RATHER THAN TO ARREST DISSIDENTS AFTER INCIDENTS OCCUR.

3. ARRESTS ARE STILL MADE. KNCC STATISTICS WHICH SHOWED 140 POLITICAL PRISONERS IN AUGUST NOW SHOW 170. ALMOST TWO THIRDS OF THIS INCREASE, HOWEVER, COMES FROM IDENTIFICATION OF POLITICAL PRISONERS THE KNCC WAS NOT PREVIOUSLY AWARE OF, BUT ABOUT A DOZEN REPRESENT NEW ARRESTS. IN A NUMBER OF THESE CASES, THOSE ARRESTED HAD CRITICIZED PRESIDENT PAK PERSONALLY OR THE MILITARY INSTITUTION, AND THE ROKG'S THRESHOLD OF TOLERANCE IS NOT THAT HIGH YET.

4. COURT DOCKETS STILL CONTAIN EM-9 CASES. SOME NOTABLE CASES BEFORE THE COURTS IN SEPTEMBER INCLUDED HEARINGS ON INCIDENTS WHICH OCCURED IN THE SPRING AT THE TIME OF THE TENSIONS GENERATED BY THE RETURN OF STUDENTS TO THE CAMPUSES AND THE CIRCULATION OF THE MARCH 22 CHARTER. TWO TRIALS INVOLVE A TOTAL OF SIX SNU STUDENTS AND ANOTHER INVOLVES FIVE STUDENTS OF THE HANKUK THEOLOGY SEMINARY. THESE CASES ARE OF MORE THAN USUAL INTEREST SINCE ONE OF THE SNU STUDENTS IS THE SON OF REV. PAK HYONG-KYU, A WELL KNOWN SOCIAL ACTIVIST, AND ONE OF THE STUDENTS IN THE HANKUK SEMINARY CASE IS THE SON OF REV. KIM KWAN-SUK, CONFIDENTIAL

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SECGEN OF THE KNCC. IN BOTH OF THESE CASES, SENTENCING MAY OCCUR BY THE END OF SEPTEMBER. ONE OTHER CASE DEALING WITH AN INCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED PRIOR TO THE ROKG'S MOVES TOWARD RELAXATION CONCERNS CHANG KI-PYO, AN INTELLECTUAL WHO WAS ACCUSED OF MANIPULATING A TRADE UNION FOR POLITICAL ENDS. HE WAS SENTENCED TO 5 YEARS IN PRISON ON SEPTEMBER 3.

5. NEW CASES INVOLVE YANG SONG-U, A POET WHO PERMITTED AN ANTI-MILITARY POEM OF HIS TO BE PUBLISHED IN JAPAN: TWO MINISTERS OF THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH, REVS. CHO YONG-SUL AND O CHUNG-IL, WHO CRITICIZED PRESIDENT PAK AS A CRYPTO-COMMUNIST; AND MRS. YI SO-SUN, A TRADE UNION ACTIVIST, WHO WAS CHARGED WITH CONTEMPT OF COURT FOR HER BEHAVIOR AT THE TRIAL OF CHANG KI-PYO.

6. DISSIDENTS, PERHAPS MESMERIZED BY THE ROKG'S SUMMER MOVES TOWARD RELAXATION, HAVE BEEN RELATIVELY QUIET. OF COURSE, THERE HAVE BEEN PRAYER MEETINGS TO URGE PROMPT RELEASE OF PRISONERS, BREF HUNGER STRIKES FOR THE SAME PURPOSE, LETTERS CRITICAL OF NDP LEADER YI CHOL-SEUNG, ETC., BUT NOTHING TO CAUSE THE ROKG CONCERN. A KNCC STATEMENT

ON THE PAK TONG-SUN CASE DID SEEM TO PROMPT AUTHORITIES TO TRY TO BARGAIN WITH THE KNCC ONCE MORE ON HOW PRISONER RELEASE MIGHT BE SPED UP. NEW AREAS OF CONCERN ARE ARISING, HOWEVER, SOME FEEL THAT STUDENTS MAY USE THE INTER-UNIVERSITY COMPETITIONS OF OCTOBER FOR DEMONSTRATIONS. THEY REASON THAT STUDENTS FEEL THAT THE PAK TONG-SUN CASE IS ONE ISSUE WHICH CAN SHAKE THE PAK REGIME, AND THAT STUDENTS, IF THEY HAVE ANY CAPABILITY TO DEMONSTRATE AT ALL, WILL STRIKE NOW THAT THE PAK TONG-SUN CASE IS HOT. ANOTHER AREA OF CONCERN INVOLVES WORKERS. MRS. YI SO-SUN, WHO AS NOTED ABOVE IS ON TRIAL FOR CONTEMPT OF

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 SEOUL 8223

COURT, IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE CHONGKYE GARMENT WORKERS UNION (ALSO KNOWN AS PYONGWHA MARKET WORKERS). SOME OF THESE WORKERS HAVE STRONG PERSONAL AND EMOTIONAL TIES TO MRS. YI, AND THEY CAN BE EXPECTED TO DO THEIR UTMOST TO SUPPORT HER. THESE WORKERS STAGED A BRIEF DEMONSTRATION IN THE MARKET AREA LAST WEEK, AND INITIATED A HUNGER STRIKE A FEW DAYS AGO AT SEOUL'S CHEIL CHURCH. ROKG OFFICIALS TOLD EMBASSY THEY FELT SITUATION COULD LEAD TO SMALL CONFRONTATIONS WITH POLICE WHICH WHILE NO THREAT TO PUBLIC ORDER COULD CAUSE EMBARRASSING PUBLICITY FOR ROKG ABROAD. CONCERNS ABOUT STUDENTS AND THIS ONE LABOR-RELATED DISPUTE PROBABLY HAVE THEIR IMPACT ON SLOWING ROKG MOVES TO RELAX CONTROLS.

7. DESPITE THIS ENVIRONMENT CLOSE TO STALEMATE, THE ROKG AND THE DISSIDENTS, SPEAKING THROUGH THE CHURCHES, ARE STILL IN CONTACT. REFTEL REPORTED AN ROKG OFFER TO THE CHURCHES TO RENEW DIALOGUE ON PRISONER RELEASE. ON SEPTEMBER 26, REV. KIM KWAN-SUK, SEC GEN KNCC, TOLD EMBASSY

THAT KNCC HAD ASKED KCIA TO OBTAIN ENDORSEMENT OF FAMILIES OF PRISONERS BEFORE KNCC COULD CONSIDER NEW ROLE IN STRATEGY TO RELEASE PRISONERS. KNCC EXECUTIVE BOARD NOW APPARENTLY UNSURE OF ITS MORAL RIGHT TO INTERFERE WITH THE COMMITMENT OF PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE. A CHRISTIAN
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STUDENT LEADER AND AN URBAN INDUSTRIAL MISSION OFFICIAL TOLD EMBOFF THAT THEY FELT HUMAN RIGHTS OFFENSIVE WAS PARALYZED WITH LEADING ACTIVISTS IN PRISON, SHUT OFF FROM KOREAN AND INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME ROKG WHICH HAS OFFERED TO RELEASE THEM IS SPARED INTENSE BAD PUBLICITY IT USED TO RECEIVE. THESE LEADERS COMPLAINED THAT KNCC EXECUTIVE BOARD SHOULD BE THINKING IN TERMS OF STRATEGY AND GET THE PRISONERS TO SIGN, BUT INSTEAD BOARD WAS, IN THEIR OPINION, HUNG UP ON DELICATE POINTS OF MORAL PRINCIPLE. EMBOFF FOUND THIS OPINION A NEW VIEW AT KNCC, AND DOUBTS THAT IT IS WIDESPREAD OR THAT IT HAS YET PENETRATED EXECUTIVE BOARD ROOM.

8. A NEW ARENA FOR ATTENTION IN THE KOREAN HUMAN RIGHTS SCENE IS THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. THE ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION OF JUNE SET UP THE SCENARIO WHICH LED TO THE RELEASE OF PRISONERS ON JULY 17 AND AUGUST 15. THE NDP'S YI CHOL-SEUNG HAS MADE NUMEROUS PUBLIC STATEMENTS CALLING UPON THE ROKG TO CONTINUE TEASING PRISONERS. YI ASSERTS THAT "POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT" IS ALSO IN THE CARDS. THE NDP HAS APPARENTLY PREPARED A PACKAGE OF ELECTORAL REFORMS FOR THE CURRENT ASSEMBLY SESSION. ALTHOUGH ROKG OPPOSITION TO MOVES AFFECTING THE YUSHIN SYSTEM SEEMS CLEAR, SUCH REFORMS AS AUTHORIZATION FOR PARTY NOMINATED POLL WATCHERS AT ELECTIONS AND INCREASING THE NUMBER OF ASSEMBLYMEN FROM LARGE DISTRICTS (A MOVE WHICH COULD STRENGTHEN THE VIABILITY OF POLITICAL PARTIES BY PLACING A BIT MORE PATRONAGE AT THEIR DISPOSAL) MAY BE POSSIBLE. THESE MAY SEEM SMALL STEPS, BUT ANY STEP IN THE DIRECTION OF INCREASING CONFIDENCE IN THE ELECTION SYSTEM OR UPGRADING THE ROLE OF PARTIES WOULD BE SIGNIFICANT IN LIGHT OF THE TRENDS OF THE LAST FIVE YEARS.

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9. THE ROKG'S RELATIVE LOSS OF EAGERNESS IN MOVING TO RELEASE PRISONERS OR PROCEED ALONG THE ROUTE OF "POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT" COULD BE DUE TO THE IMPACT OF THE PAK TONG-SUN CASE. AS THE EMBASSY REPORTED IN JUNE AND JULY, PRESIDENT

PAK PROBABLY WAS ENCOURAGED TO MAKE CONCILIATORY GESTURES TO THE OPPOSITION BY A SENSE THAT THE PUBLIC WAS RALLYING AROUND HIM AS THE ONE MAN CAPABLE OF CARRYING KOREA THROUGH THE PERILS FACING THE NATION AS A RESULT OF THE U.S. TROOP WITHDRAWALS. THE PAK TONG-SUN AFFAIR AND HEIGHTENED STRAINS IN U.S.-ROK RELATIONS, WHILE THEY SHOW NO SIGNS OF CAUSING PRESIDENT PAK SERIOUS CONTROL PROBLEMS, COULD BE SEEN AS REDUCING HIS ASCENDANCE OVER ANY POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE LEADER, AS REDUCING THE EXCEPTIONAL PUBLIC SUPPORT HE ENJOYED AT MID-YEAR, AND, CONSEQUENTLY, AS MAKING HIM LESS EAGER TO SLACKEN HIS HOLD ANY FURTHER THAN HE HAS ALREADY DONE. IN ADDITION, IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT U.S. CONCERN ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS IN KOREA CONTRIBUTED TO PAK'S DECISION TO LET UP IN THE FIRST PLACE, AND, WITH THE FRICTION BETWEEN THE U.S. AND THE ROK OVER THE PAK TONG-SUN AFFAIR, THE PRESIDENT LIKELY FEELS THAT THE PRESENT TIME IS NOT APPROPRAITE FOR SPECIAL GESTURES ON BEHALF OF THE U.S.

10. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT THE ROKG'S POSTURE TOWARD PRISONER RELEASE IS PASSIVE RATHER THAN ACTIVE DENIAL. ITS OFFER TO RELEASE PRISONERS WHO SIGN STATEMENTS OF REPENTANCE STILL STANDS. PRESIDENT PARK HAS REAFFIRMED HIS OFFER PRIVATELY IN TALKS WITH VISITING AMERICANS. THE BALL IS IN THE DISSIDENTS' COURT, AND THE ROKG CAN INSIST THAT THE ONLY CHAINS HOLDING THE PRISONERS IN JAIL IS THAT OF THEIR OWN UNWILLINGNESS TO SIGN THEMSELVES OUT. SOME DISSIDNETS ARE ALREADY BEGINNING TO FEEL THAT THE PRISONERS COULD DO MORE FOR THE CAUSE OUT OF PRISON THAN THEY DO IN. WHEN THIS OCCURS TO THE PRISONERS THEY MAY SIGN OR GIVE THOSE NEGOTIATING WITH THE AUTHORITIES ON THEIR BEHALF MORE ROOM TO COMPROMISE ON A FORMULA FOR THEIR RELEASE.

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